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SUBJECT: 30th Permanent Conference General Assembly of African and French Consular Chambers, October 3 - 6, 2004

¶1. (U) Summary: The 30th general assembly of the Permanent Conference of African and French Consular Chambers (CPCCAF) took place in Djibouti from October 3 to October 6, 2004. Several Djiboutian high officials in the Djiboutian government, the President of the CPCCAF and the French Ambassador spoke at the opening ceremony. Ninety delegates from 23 Chambers of Commerce members met in Djibouti to discuss the ways and means to strengthen partnerships between the French Chambers of Commerce and the African Chambers of Commerce. This was the first time the General Assembly of the CPCCAF was held in Djibouti, East Africa. Pol/Econ and Econ/Com Asst spoke with Mr. Youssouf Tani, Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce of Djibouti (CCD) and the Chief Coordinator for the conference, who seemed very satisfied with the results of the conference. End of Summary

¶2. (U) The Prime Minister, the French Ambassador, the President of the CPCCAF, the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Djibouti and the Minister of Trade took turn to speak at the inauguration day. The Djiboutian officials saluted the decision of the CPCCAF to hold its general assembly in Djibouti for the first time. They elaborated on Djibouti's advantages including stability, liberal economic regime, strategic location, modern telecom but most of all the potential of the port of Doraleh as a regional distribution center. They also commended the pertinence of the projects funded by the CPCCAF, which address the real needs of its African members. Full of confidence, Ambassador of France to the Republic of Djibouti Phillippe Selz reiterated France's intention to continue to support the CPCCAF initiative, which is "strengthening ties between France and the African countries".

¶3. (U) Ninety delegates representing Chambers of Commerce from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa, Comoros, Congo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Togo, Rwanda, and France flew to Djibouti for the occasion. The general assembly is held at a different African country every year but it is the first time that it is organized in Djibouti. According to Mr. Paul Obambi, President of the CPCCAF, President Guelleh requested Djibouti to be the venue of this 30th assembly during his visit to France in 2002. Mr. Obambi added that the CCD also played a major role in convincing the CPCCAF to organize its general assembly in Djibouti

¶4. (U) Created in 1973, the CPCCAF is a cooperative association between France and its former African colonies. The CPCCAF, based in Paris is designed to provide technical assistance to the African chambers of commerce, which should result in better services to the African businesses. One major objective of the CPCCAF is to mobilize the existing expertise within the CPCCAF and share it with other members to build their capacity, which is necessary for a well-structured and dynamic private sector. The main topics of discussion included Institutional Capacity Building & Good Governance, Support to Firms & Development of Industrial and Commercial Services, Professional Training & Employment, Infrastructure & Investment, and Agriculture.

¶5. (U) Mr. Tani said that he was satisfied with the assistance that the CCD received from its French counterparts. For instance, the International Chamber of Commerce of Grenoble (France) trained two elected members of the CCD about their specific job fields. The CCD also benefited from a training program of its members on private business management. In addition, the CPCCAF organized a seminar for the Djiboutians tour operators. Furthermore, the International Chamber of Commerce of Rouen (France) organized a visit to the port of Rouen, which has many similarities with the port of Djibouti, which was attended by Djiboutian businesses. Seen as extremely important to Djibouti's economic development, the CCD has recently requested technical assistance from Paris International Chamber of Commerce in setting up a Regional Mediation Center in Djibouti. This center will have the purpose of settling any commercial dispute as a legal alternative to the Court, which is slow and not always transparent. It is expected that this initiative will bring some comfort to national and foreign investors.

16. (U) Mr. Tani indicated that the conference was very successful and the CCD reached its target of introducing Djibouti to the CPCCAF, which represents more than 1 million African and French businesses. The CPCCAF members visited the Port of Doraleh, which remains "the most important infrastructure realized in East Africa" according to Mr. Obambi. Mr. Obambi assured that the African business community would be closely following the economic developments in Djibouti. Mr. Tani said that the CPCCAF has been so successful that many countries are offering to join and that is an issue being discussed by the members of the CPCCAF. He felt, however, that increasing the numbers of members will make the grouping "impersonal" and will damage all the affinities that have developed between the members over the years. Holding this general assembly in Djibouti shows the will of Djibouti officials to consolidate economic ties with France.

16. (SBU) Comment: To mark the importance of this event, almost the entire Ministerial Cabinet was present at the opening day, which confirms the current tendency of the GOD to show good faith and re-establish normal relations with France. The limited assistance offered by the CPCCAF brings good benefits to the Chamber of Commerce of Djibouti. It is clear, however, that the CPCCAF serves above all France's best economic and strategic interest.